

**INTERNATIONAL LONGSHORE AND WAREHOUSE UNION**  
**PACIFIC COAST PENSIONERS ASSOCIATION ORAL HISTORY PROJECT**  
**LABOR ARCHIVES OF WASHINGTON**  
**UNIVERSITY OF WASHINGTON LIBRARIES SPECIAL COLLECTIONS**  
**HUGH HUNTER OF ILWU LOCAL 13, PCPA**

**INTERVIEWEE:** HUGH HUNTER

**INTERVIEWERS:** HARVEY SCHWARTZ

**SUBJECTS:** World War II; Sailors' Union of the Pacific; Accidents; Cotton; Rubber; Pilferage

**LOCATION:** 2013 PCPA CONVENTION, PORTLAND, OREGON

**DATE:** SEPTEMBER 16-18, 2013

**INTERVIEW LENGTH:** 00:32:46

**FILE NAME:** HunterHugh\_PCPA\_2013\_Video\_acc6194-001.mp4

*The Labor Archives of Washington is committed to preserving the voices and stories of individuals who have contributed to the labor movement's rich history. The LAW presents oral history interviews as part of its contribution to helping curate and create access to a broad and inclusive historical record. These interviews contain the personal recollections and opinions of the individuals involved and, therefore, may contain language, ideas or stereotypes that are offensive or harmful to others.*

*Individual oral histories cannot serve as the sole source of historical information about an institution or event. These narratives do not represent the views of the Labor Archives of Washington, Libraries Special Collections, or the University of Washington, past or present.*

[00:00:00] **HARVEY SCHWARTZ:** This oral history project is part of the Pacific Coast Pensioners Association Oral History Project. Hugh, can you tell us your name and your date of birth and where you're from?

[00:00:22] **HUGH HUNTER:** Hugh Howard Hunter. Twenty first of August, 1924. I was born in Sydney, Australia.

[00:00:35] **HARVEY:** We're going to branch out here. Can you tell me a little bit about your background in Sydney, growing up?

[00:00:42] **HUGH:** Growing up, I went to school there. They called it intermediate school. I went to sea when I was 15. It was on a passenger ship. Sydney [, Australia] , Auckland [, New Zealand] , Suva [, Fiji] , Honolulu [,

Hawai'i], Vancouver was the ports that I went to. I was a bell hop on there. I was on there for a year, and then, after that, I was on the Queen Mary for five months trooping from Sydney to Port [inaudible] in the Middle East

Then I was on a ship called the [MS] Duntroon. This is a story that's unbelievable, really. A mate of mine and I went ashore. We got drunk. We came back to the ship; she was ready to pull out in Adelaide. He went back aft and dove over the stern, and, like a fool, I followed him. The ship was already on the way. The cops picked us up and we went to Melbourne. They blacklisted us, more or less, on the coast. The next ship I got on was a Blue Funnel Line ship, an English ship, a combination of passenger and cargo. We had a bunch of women and children from Singapore—refugees going back to England. That's what we had on there, plus cargo.

In '42, we were torpedoed 50 miles southeast of Cape Lookout [, North Carolina] . We were picked up by a United States destroyer, an old four-stacker. I don't know if you remember them or not, but they were World War I destroyers. They took us into Charleston, South Carolina. The crew, we went to New York and stayed there a couple of weeks. Then they took us up to Halifax [, Nova Scotia] as DBS, which means "distressed British seamen."

I went to England; well, Glasgow [, Scotland] was the port they put us off in. I went to London with the rest of the crew. About a week after we got there, they were sending us all back on another ship that was supposed to go to Liverpool. About five of us went out and got drunk. We missed the train. We went down to the company the next day, and they said, "You're too late."

So we hung around London for a while. Australia House is right on the Strand there. We used to hang around there. We weren't doing anything, actually. They couldn't make us ship out on English ships because we're Australians. So they asked us if we wanted to get on American ships. I was one that said yes. They sent me to Cardiff, Wales, and I got on a ship there.

Don't shake your head! This is all the truth! [laughing]

[00:04:53] **HARVEY:** Keep going!

[00:04:55] **HUGH:** I got on an old Bull Line [A.H. Bull & Co.] ship. The SS Jean. He called all his ships after his daughters and relatives. I was on the Jean, and we went up to Boston. The British consul pulled me off the ship. I had a big rigmarole about how they had no right pulling me off because I was an Australian citizen. They tried to starve me out, but they didn't succeed. They cut me loose. I shipped out on a liberty, the John G. Garfield on the Atlantic. I made, I think, one trip.

It came back, paid off the ship. This is unbelievable. I was in Times Square, going down the subway, and I ran into a mate of mine from Australia. Times Square subway is probably the busiest place in the world. He says, "What are you doing?" I says, "I just paid off ship." There were two more Aussies there he was staying with. He says, "We're going over to the West Coast."

This hasn't got much to do with longshoring [laughing] , but anyhow we came over here. That's another story. It's a long story. We were hitchhiking and leaving Houston [, Texas] . A couple picked us up in a car. We had a bad accent then, and we were dressed in black, like seamen's garb and a ditty bag. No sooner had they let us off than the border patrol came along. This is the middle of Texas. They said, "What are you?" We said, "We're Australian seamen." He says, "Jesus, you're a long way from the water." We're in the middle of Texas. So they busted us and put us in jail in Eagle Pass, Texas. We bitched and moaned about it. It was just a terrible place. The jail was just horrible.

[00:07:50] **HARVEY:** What was this town again?

[00:07:51] **HUGH:** Eagle Pass, Texas. It's on the border. They let us loose because we were federal prisoners, really. They took us to Del Rio [, Texas] , and they went through a lot of formalities and found out that we were who we said we were. They cut us loose. I'll never forget it, we went to see USO [United Service Organization] , and this woman gave us a bus ticket to go to L.A. because we didn't have any money. Just the two of us. Gave us a few bucks to eat. Went to San Pedro [, Los Angeles] .

We both went over to the [Sailors' Union of the Pacific Hall] in Wilmington [, Los Angeles] . Both got on a ship. I was still an Australian. I kept on shipping till '56. I was married then. I shipped out with my wife's brother in '46, something like that. Fell in love, got married, naturally, and stayed here ever after. When I got my citizenship, it was in '56. I got a job ashore, and, after that, my wife's cousin's husband was a longshoreman. In those days, it was sponsorship. He asked me if I wanted to be sponsored. This was in '63. '63 I got my ID. Did my thing, working and getting class A. Best job I ever had in the world.

[00:09:48] **HARVEY:** You got class A in '63?

[00:09:54] **HUGH:** No, no, I think it was '65.

[00:09:56] **HARVEY:** What were you doing between '56 and '63?

[00:10:01] **HUGH:** I was working ashore. I was working as a maintenance man.

[00:10:06] **HARVEY:** How come you guys decided to go from the East Coast to the West Coast? What was that whole thing about?

[00:10:13] **HUGH:** Well, we were going to go home.

[00:10:17] **HARVEY:** Originally, that was the idea?

[00:10:18] **HUGH:** That was the idea. There were four of us, but my mate and I left the other two guys. He met some girl. He told me, "Look, I'm going to get some money off this chick." Which never happened! [laughing] So we ended up in Houston at the Brazos Hotel, a merchant seamen's hotel. We hitchhiked out of there; that's when we got busted by the border patrol. After I got my book, I just settled down, got married.

[00:11:03] **HARVEY:** Let me ask you a question.

[00:11:05] **HUGH:** Go ahead.

[00:11:05] **HARVEY:** When did you first get to the waterfront? What year was that?

[00:11:13] **HUGH:** '63.

[00:11:13] **HARVEY:** '63. That's the first time you were on the waterfront.

[00:11:16] **HUGH:** Yes, working as a longshoreman. Before that, I was a seaman.

[00:11:24] **HARVEY:** Were you in the Seamen's Union in Australia?

[00:11:26] **HUGH:** Well, the Seamen's Union was sort of iffy in Australia in those days. The wharfies had a union [Maritime Union of Australia] , but the seamen were sort of iffy. I was never a member of the Seamen's Union in Australia, even though I was on a passenger ship. It wasn't mandatory to be in the union. I didn't give it much thought. I was just a kid anyway, only 15, 16 years old.

[00:11:57] **HARVEY:** 1963, you—

[00:12:00] **HUGH:** I got my ID in '63.

[00:12:02] **HARVEY:** Can you remember the—

[00:12:05] **HUGH:** I don't remember the date!

[00:12:07] **HARVEY:** No, the year is good enough.

[00:12:09] **HUGH:** I was going to say, come on!

[00:12:12] **HARVEY:** Ok, we kind of got how you got in. Can you remember your first day on the waterfront, your first day working as a longshore worker?

[00:12:18] **HUGH:** Yes, I can.

[00:12:18] **HARVEY:** Can you tell us about it?

[00:12:21] **HUGH:** We got dispatched. I knew the guy I got dispatched with. We went down; I think it was Berth 144 in Wilmington. They opened the hatch, and it was full of fishmeal from the top to the bottom. Which was a great, great awakening on the waterfront. It was the worst cargo you could do. We were working opposite a couple of regulars, who wouldn't tell us shit, how to do anything. Just do it yourself, that was the name of the game. Put a board, and put the sacks on. Dig a hole. You know the routine.

[00:13:07] **HARVEY:** No, we don't. Can you tell us about it?

[00:13:08] **HUGH:** Well, you'd dig a hole. First you'd get the fishmeal, two guys. Put the sacks on a board, and you'd dig a whole. They'd land the board in the hole. You'd pull the sacks from the top and put them on the board. Terrible, terrible job. As a matter of fact, both of us thought about quitting. But we stuck it out anyways. Here I am. [laughing]

[00:13:40] **HARVEY:** What did you think about the union? What was your experience with the union?

[00:13:42] **HUGH:** I thought it was great. I had a cousin in Sydney who belonged to the wharfies. He was sort of a Red. They had meetings and all that stuff. But, like I say, in those days I was a kid. 15, 16 years old. When I got on the Ulysses, that Blue Funnel Line ship, that's the last time I was in Australia, really. That was in '42 when we got torpedoed.

[00:14:25] **HARVEY:** Before you got into the ILWU, before you became a casual in '63—

[00:14:30] **HUGH:** Not a casual. ID.

[00:14:31] **HARVEY:** I'm sorry, an ID. Did you know anything about the union? Did you have any view of it before you came into it? I know you come from Australia.

[00:14:41] **HUGH:** You're relating that to Harry Bridges, but no, not really. It was something that was looked upon with a lot of respect in Wilmington and San Pedro amongst the seamen, which I was. It was respected and a lot of people wanted to be a longie. Why, I don't know, when they had to unload fishmeal. [laughing]

[00:15:12] **HARVEY:** Is that the worst cargo you ever worked?

[00:15:15] **HUGH:** It was on the top of the list!

[00:15:18] **HARVEY:** Any other ones?

[00:15:19] **HUGH:** Rubber was bad.

[00:15:21] **HARVEY:** How so?

[00:15:22] **HUGH:** Because it came in bales of rubber. It would be from the top of the hatch. You had to get a net. You'd dig down and put the rubber bales in there. I forget how many. Then you'd have to climb up on them and pull them out. They would bounce all over the goddamn hatch. That wasn't bad, but...

[00:15:47] **HARVEY:** Did you ever work hides?

[00:15:48] **HUGH:** Oh, yes.

[00:15:49] **HARVEY:** What was that like? Was that fun?

[00:15:52] **HUGH:** No, it was terrible. Most of them were Japanese ships. They were very particular not to mark them up and all that stuff. You'd get hides, and you'd start stowing them. You'd put lathe in between them. Most of the hides were aft. Because of the smell, for the crew, I guess. On the hatch, it would be by the engine room, which was continuously in motion. You'd go in at noon. You'd come back, and all the shit would be falling down. You'd have to do it again. It was a nasty job. Hides were a nasty job.

[00:16:55] **HARVEY:** Did you say there was something between each hide?

[00:16:58] **HUGH:** Not between each one. They had lathe that they put down.

[00:17:02] **HARVEY:** What is that exactly?

[00:17:03] **HUGH:** Strips of wood. More or less a bearing for the hides going up. But that was a pretty nasty job.

[00:17:15] **HARVEY:** What about the best product that you ever worked? The one that was least onerous?

[00:17:20] **HUGH:** Where you're doing nothing? [laughing]

[00:17:22] **HARVEY:** Yes, like that.

[00:17:25] **HUGH:** When they started utilizing cages, they put lift in the hold, which was just gravy. You'd have a lift; you'd have a driver. Most of the cargo was palletized. So you really didn't do that much.

There was a lot of bad jobs. Cotton was really bad.

[00:17:58] **HARVEY:** How come?

[00:17:59] **HUGH:** You had to beam it up. You had to fill the hatch up with cotton. Getting up, when you're reaching the top, and you're in the wings. The wings are part of the hold that are out of the hatch space. You had to beam up the cotton. That wasn't an easy job. It was a hard job.

[00:18:27] **HARVEY:** How do you beam up the cotton?

[00:18:29] **HUGH:** With hooks. You had a partner. You'd get on each side of the bale. Put your hook in there, and beam it up.

[00:18:40] **HARVEY:** How much does each bale weigh?

[00:18:43] **HUGH:** Oh, shoot. I couldn't lift them, [laughing] but they were heavy. The worst thing were what they called lenox which is a type of cotton, but it's compressed. Cotton rolls, when you had them down below, you could roll it. Lenox, you have to pick it up and flop it over, pick it up and flop it over. It was sort of hard.

Australian sand that the Matson [Matson, Inc.] ships used to bring in. Black sand. It was used for emery cloth. They'd come in small sacks. It was heavy. It was too little for two guys and really too much for one guy. You had to take it out and do your thing and unload the sand.

[00:19:51] **HARVEY:** It came in bags?

[00:19:53] **HUGH:** Sacks.

[00:19:54] **HARVEY:** And you work it with another guy?

[00:19:55] **HUGH:** Well, you always had a partner. Always.

[00:20:00] **HARVEY:** Did you ever get hurt on the waterfront?

[00:20:01] **HUGH:** I broke my ankle. A load of pipe fell on my ankle and broke it. Just one of those things.

[00:20:17] **HARVEY:** Any other accidents that you saw?

[00:20:19] **HUGH:** Not really. Well, I was on a ship where a guy got killed. We were working a fire boat over in Long Beach [, California] . It was a Norwegian ship. They had a fire in the hold; it was cotton, and it was smoldering. We had to go over and discharge the hold. We had an old crescent crane that was discharging. This guy named Sandy, Sanderson was leaning over the combing and giving signals, which he shouldn't have been doing. The pole snapped on the crane and just cut him in two, just about. That's the only guy I saw get really hammered, was Sandy. We had a drink at noon, actually.

[00:21:27] **HARVEY:** Oh, boy, that's a tough one.

[00:21:32] **HUGH:** He was a good guy, too. His father was a boss.

[00:21:36] **HARVEY:** We appreciate you telling us about that, as painful as it can be.

[00:21:41] **HUGH:** It wasn't good.

[00:21:42] **HARVEY:** Of course not. How about activity in the union? Were you active in the union?

[00:21:47] **HUGH:** Not really. I was more or less a drinker. You have different groups that you hang with. I hung with mostly the Mexican guys. I don't know why. Well, I married one, actually. Well, she was from here, from El Paso [, Texas] , but I hung with them mostly. Mostly all of them were drinkers. I liked to drink. A lot of booze was free then because it came in cargo. You break into the cargo and take a bottle or whatever. I was primarily a beer drinker, so I had to pay for my own.

[00:22:38] **HARVEY:** How often did a cargo have breakage? Very often was that?

[00:22:39] **HUGH:** Oh, yes. Pilferage, you mean?

[00:22:40] **HARVEY:** Yes.

[00:22:40] **HUGH:** Yes, it went on. Sure, it did. I mean, it was part of the game. Customs would be there; you'd have to outwit the customs. Which you did successfully most of the time.

[00:23:05] **HARVEY:** How'd you do that?

[00:23:09] **HUGH:** Different ways, I guess. If you were working, booze, like scotch on the English ships coming in, most of the time a mate would come down and say, "Please just open one." Because they expected it. There was a lot of pilferage going on. A lot of it, really. You had a different type of person. Now the longshoremen mostly, they save their money and they invest and all that stuff. Good people.

[00:23:51] **HARVEY:** Different world, yes.

[00:23:53] **HUGH:** It's a different world.

[00:23:54] **HARVEY:** Did you hear many stories about the 1934 strike? The big strike of '34?

[00:24:00] **HUGH:** Yeah.

[00:24:01] **HARVEY:** What did guys tell you?

[00:24:03] **HUGH:** About the bosses and the shape-up that happened in those days. Funny thing, most longshoremen were seamen in those days. The word longshoremen came from the men along the shore. And Harry [Bridges], he was a seaman.

[00:24:30] **HARVEY:** What about the 1971 [Strike] ?

[00:24:37] **HUGH:** I was in that, yes.

[00:24:39] **HARVEY:** What did you do then, at that time?

[00:24:41] **HUGH:** Stood your picket duty. You did picket duty.

[00:24:46] **HARVEY:** Do you remember any stories around that?

[00:24:49] **HUGH:** No, not really. I was picketing in Wilmington. There was a bar across the street, Shipwreck Joey's, so I spent a lot of time in there. [laughing] But you didn't give it much thought. You just thought, "Well, we're going to tough it out and see what happens." Nobody was really hostile about it. They accepted it. If we're on strike, we're on strike. That's the way it goes.

[00:25:24] **HARVEY:** Did you get any outside work then?

[00:25:26] **HUGH:** No, I didn't.

[00:25:28] **HARVEY:** How did your family get by at that time? You were married then.

[00:25:31] **HUGH:** Yes, I was married. Had kids. How I got by? I was never on unemployment. I don't know how I got by. I just got by. How do you get by? I had a little money saved, I guess. It went.

[00:25:57] **HARVEY:** You didn't have mortgages, houses, boats?

[00:26:02] **HUGH:** No, no, because I wasn't in that group of people. People I hung with were all like me, broke and drinkers. So, that was the way it went. I'm fortunate I'm still here, really. [laughing]

[00:26:22] **HARVEY:** Some of us are. What about the 2002 Lockout? Had you retired yet?

[00:26:28] **HUGH:** 2002? No. Wait a minute! I've been retired 27 years. I got out when I was 62. It's 2013 now, so 27 years from that is?

[00:26:48] **HARVEY:** Is it 1970, approximately? Because you were born in 1924. And you were 62 when you retired. Oh, I'm wrong about that. It should have been about 1986. So you retired before the 2002 Lockout. So you retired around 1986. How come you retired at that point?

[00:27:17] **HUGH:** I had decided to. A lot of people just stay till they die. They become enamored with, especially now, the money they're making, which is an astronomical sum. There's one guy that retired recently was making \$20,000 a month in retirement. I didn't make that sort of money, but he did. He was a top guy down south. I was never into accumulating. I bought a house, paid it off. I was never into getting a summer home or a second car or something like that. Moving out of Wilmington. It just wasn't my bag; that's all. [shrugs] We're all different.

[00:28:18] **HARVEY:** So you were 62. How come you didn't decide to stay till 65?

[00:28:22] **HUGH:** I was tired of working. I'd worked since I was 15 years old, and I'd just had it. I thought, 'shit, there's other things besides this.' Which there are. A lot people don't think so, but there's other things to do. I've stayed active with the Pensioners.

[00:28:48] **HARVEY:** How come you decided to get active in the Pensioners Association?

[00:28:53] **HUGH:** I don't know, it's just a normal thing. I didn't give it any special thought. Then I was really active in the voting committee. I was in charge of it for a while. I got on the executive board. It just came naturally, I guess. There's no thought about it.

[00:29:36] **HARVEY:** We often ask a final question. Looking back, what did it all mean to you?

[00:29:42] **HUGH:** I thought it was the greatest thing in the world, being a longshoreman. But of course I was raised during a period of time where when you were on English ships, it was like a dog. The conditions were horrible. When I got on American ships, I thought, "Jesus, they're printing money here and throwing it away." I'd never seen so much money in my life. [laughing] That's the way it went. And here I am, in Portland!

[00:30:19] **HARVEY:** Absolutely! Do you have anything you'd like to add? Did we miss anything really important or big? Any major thing we missed?

[00:30:28] **HUGH:** No, I don't think so.

[00:30:29] **HARVEY:** Did you ever meet Harry Bridges?

[00:30:32] **HUGH:** I said "Hi." But no, no, no. I never came on that Australia bit. I could have. I hung with people that were not necessarily union people, that were [not] really active. I attended meetings and stuff like that. But I was more or less a drinker. Unfortunately.

[00:31:05] **HARVEY:** Do you still hang around with the Mexican community?

[00:31:07] **HUGH:** Oh, yes. My wife was Mexican; well, she was born in El Paso. I shipped out with her brother in '46, I think. We went to China, for a few months, actually. Tsingtao, China. But then I met her. She



invited me home, which was odd in those days because the Chicanos and the Paddies didn't get along well in those days, not really. San Pedro and Wilmington, they did. Fell in love, married her. That's the way it goes!

[00:32:00] **HARVEY:** Is she still with us?

[00:32:02] **HUGH:** No, unfortunately, I lost her three years ago October. We were married 62 years, and I went with her a couple years prior to that. That's the biggest thing that ever happened to me, getting married. After 15, when I started shipping out, I never had a home. I was a seaman. Getting on a ship, that's no home. And it was through the war, which was a different time.

[00:32:41] **HARVEY:** That's quite clear.

[00:32:43] **HUGH:** But there you go.

[00:32:44] **HARVEY:** Much appreciated. You're wired up, so you have to be careful. We thank you for participating.